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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000568

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND COUNSELS PATIENCE IN DEALING
WITH NORTHERN IRELAND

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Classified By: Charge Robert J. Faucher; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) EUR/WE Office Director Pamela Spratlen reviewed the Northern Ireland peace process with senior Irish government officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and the Office of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), October 7-8. Each government official voiced the opinion that the current stalemate in Northern Ireland over the devolution of policing and justice is likely to be resolved eventually, though it will take time. In the meantime, they counsel patience by all parties and suggest that the U.S. continue to employ measures that have worked well in the past: wise counsel (e.g., through the Special Envoy), program support (e.g., the May 2008 investment conference), and access to the U.S. and its leaders (e.g., participation in St. Patrick's Day events at the White House). End summary.

¶2. (C) Spratlen discussed the Northern Ireland peace process with Rory Montgomery, Political Director, Department of Foreign Affairs, Sean Aylward, Secretary General, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Maire Flanagan, Assistant Principal Officer, Northern Ireland Division, Office of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). The Irish Government believes a fundamental change has occurred in Northern Ireland and there will be no going back to the violence of the Troubles, according to Montgomery. However, he said, there continues to be an underlying inability of political leaders in the North, as well as many citizens there, to overcome the emotional baggage and lack of trust wrought by 30 years of conflict, especially since Sinn Fein and the DUP represent factions of Northern Ireland's society that were formerly among the most partisan and violent. While Sinn Fein seems to have brought the republican community along with them into the peace process, Montgomery sees the unionists as more fragmented and thinks that current unionist leader Peter Robinson is finding it difficult to firmly grasp his leadership mantle. Robinson is constantly looking over his shoulder at his political competitors in Montgomery's view.

¶3. (C) Montgomery was confident that the devolution of policing and justice, the current crisis of the moment, would be resolved eventually, though not until well into 2009. In the meantime, he said, the Irish Government would continue to impress upon Sinn Fein the need to be patient and not provoke the unionist community. At the same time, Montgomery said, the Irish would continue to insist that unionist leaders educate their constituents and better prepare them for full power sharing with Sinn Fein in the Northern Ireland Assembly. In many respects, said Montgomery (who has unionist relatives in the North), the fundamentals for peace

are firmly in place and unionist communities are changing their views of political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Sinn Fein faster than their politicians. He noted, however, that people in the North are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Northern Ireland Assembly, which they see as not delivering on its promises over the past 17 months. In the meantime, he said, dissident republican activity is worrisome.

14. (C) Montgomery said that a U.S. withdrawal from the process at this point would be premature. He stated that there is still an important role for the U.S. as an honest broker who is willing to talk with, and encourage, the political leaders of the North.

15. (C) Describing the Northern Ireland administration as a "daily miracle," Aylward noted how remarkable it was that the two former deadly foes were able to come together to form a government in May 2007, the current "stasis" in governance in the North notwithstanding. He described DUP leader Peter Robinson as lacking the clout of former leader Ian Paisley in being able to bring disparate elements of the unionist community together, characterizing Robinson as a man who is trying to get up the nerve to jump in the face of small groups of hardline unionist "bigots," who are "difficult to cajole or persuade" and are just waiting for an excuse to try to drag Robinson down. Aylward predicted that the issue of devolution of policing and justice would be resolved in due course, though it might take a long time. In the interim, he said, patience would be required, adding that there was no button the U.S.) or the Irish - could press to speed up the process.

16. (C) Flanagan expressed appreciation for the U.S. role in the Northern Ireland peace process and also counseled

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patience in dealing with the current stalemate in relations between Sinn Fein and the DUP. She noted that the DUP is not yet prepared to discuss the devolution of policing and justice, Sinn Fein's sine qua non, within the executive committee, while Sinn Fein refuses to participate in an executive committee meeting until the devolution of policing and justice is on the agenda.

How the U.S. Can Contribute

17. (C) In addition to exercising patience, our contacts urged that the U.S. continue to employ measures that have worked well in the past: wise counsel (e.g., through the Special Envoy), program support (e.g., the May 2008 investment conference), and access to the U.S. and its leaders (e.g., participation in St. Patrick's Day events at the White House and continued issuance of visa waivers to Sinn Fein leaders who would otherwise be ineligible to travel to the U.S.).

18. (U) This report has been cleared by EUR/WE Director Pamela Spratlen.
FAUCHER